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ABSTRACT

The basis for the severe discipline imposed on school children in colonial America, especially in the Puritan colonies, was the belief in original sin. The child was regarded as being born in sin and thus depraved and prone to sin. The purpose of education was to enable children to read the Bible and thus change the behavior which otherwise would lead to damnation. The Puritan teacher was to apply constant discipline so that the ways of the child, characterized by idleness and foolish talking, would give way to the disciplined behavior that was the sign of the elect. Children were expected to act as adults and the rules they were expected to adhere to were strict, leaving little leeway for play or joyfulness. Harsh punishments for minor infractions were common. Beatings and other forms of corporal punishment occurred regularly; one legislator even suggested capital punishment for children's misbehavior. Religious instruction was an integral part of the curriculum. While the extreme disciplinary measures of the colonial period have disappeared, concepts of thrift, the involvement of government in public education, hard work, moralism, and separation of church and state have remained to influence contemporary society. (IS)

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STUDENT DISCIPLINE IN COLONIAL AMERICA

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Most of the references about the concept of the child in colonial America cite the definition held by Puritans. It is probably not appropriate to say that the same definition applied to children from the Middle and Southern colonies because of the divergent religious backgrounds of their citizens.

The Puritan definition was based on the idea of original sin, which held that the sin of the race, starting with Adam, was passed on to subsequent generations and that children were conceived in iniquity. One of the tenets of the New England Primer was that in Adam's fall, all sinned. A later edition, the New Primer, listed alphabetically eighty or more sins, from adultery to youthful lusts. (1:17)

The child was regarded as being born in corruption and was considered depraved and prone to sin. A poem by the father of John Winthorp on the birth of his son illustrates the depth of this conviction:

> Stained by birth from Adam's sinful fact
> Thence I began to sin as soon as act:
> A perverse will, a love of what's forbid,
> A serpent's sting in pleasing face lay hid.
> Welcome sweet babe, thou art unto they parents dear
> Whose hearts thou has filled with joy, as well as
> doth appear. (1:12)

To the Calvinist, the Devil was a real person who would snatch the souls of children who were already turned toward sin. So education had to be initiated to become the means whereby children could read the Bible, the book to study as the means of finding the way of salvation. (2:7) Indeed, the Massachusetts law of 1647, which presupposed that the "old deluder, Satan" was about, called for the establishment of schools for educational purposes in order to save children from his clutches.

> It being one chief object of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the scriptures, as in former times by keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these latter times by persuading from the use of tongues, that so at least the true sense and meaning of the original might be clouded by false glosses of saint-seeming deceivers, that learning might not be buried in the grave of our

fathers in the Church, and Commonwealth, the Lord assisting our endeavors. (3:119)

Christopher Dock, a teacher, believed that youth were wicked in so many ways, and the offenses taught them by older youth were so various, that he did not know where to begin to enumerate them, their commital was so broad. He stated that their corruption was so great that only the power of God was able to assuage their wickedness. Persistence in sins such as cursing and swearing would lead only to eternal damnation.

He said, concerning how different children needed different treatment and how, according to the greatness of the offense, punishment must be increased or lessened:

> I should gladly tell my friend all of this truly, but as the subject is such a broad one, I really do not know where to begin or end. This is because the wickedness of youth exhibits itself in so many ways, and the offenses which are taught them by those older than themselves are so various, and as God himself declares... Corruption is so great, and increased daily in so many ways, that I am convinced that it is impossible to do anything of one's own power. Where the Lord does not help build, all that build work in vain. The lasp of the hand, hazel branch and birch rod are means of preventing wicked outburst, but they cannot change the stubborn heart, which hold us all in such sway since the fall, that we are all inclined more to the bad than to the good, so long as the heart is unchanged and not renewed by the spirit of God. But while the seed of wickedness is present, to remove it, not only from ourselves, but from our fellow man and from our youth, as this old evil and serpent's sting is the same in all, we all are enabled to seek earnestly the same surgeon and apply the means of recovery which He prescribes for such evil, to ourselves and our youth. For without recover we cannot reach peace, for the worm that forever gnaws our conscience through the serpent's sting leads to eternal damnation. May God mercifully assist us all, that we may not neglect the promise to enter into His rest, and none of us remain behind. Amen.
>
> Because, as has been said, it would take too long to enumerate all cases, I shall give my friend only a few, together with the means that I have sought to apply. But these means cannot cure the damage. The Lord of Lords, who holds all in his hand, and for whose help we need much to pray in such cases, deserves all the praise if we see improvement.
>
> First, among many children swearing or cursing is so common,

> expressing itself variously in so many wicked words. If this evil is not warded off such 'sour leaven leavens the whole lump,' therefore such children are carefully examined, whether they understand what they are saying....To such it must be explained that they must guard against such words; that they are against God's will and command. (4:35-35)

The Puritan teacher was to apply constant discipline so that the ways of the child, characterized by idleness and foolish talking, would give way to disciplined behavior that was the sign of the elect. The child was supposed to act as an adult, be an adult. He was constantly reminded of his own evil and the punishment that he would receive. Stories told and examples given were to lead him to repentance and prayer. (5:168)

Not only did the Puritan believe in original sin and the omnipotence of good and the powerlessness of man, but he also held that moral rules for living were strict and unchanging. Sin was most often defined in Old Testament terms. (6:78) Thus, discipline was harsh and physical punishment was quite common. The New England Primer read, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of the child, but the rod of correction shall drive it from him." (7:7)

In Isaac Watts' "Young Children's Catechism," the question was posed, "What becomes of you if you are wicked?" The answer was, "If I am wicked I shall be sent to everlasting fire in Hell among wicked and misearable creatures." Wigglesworth's poem, "Day of Doom," written in 1662, specifically referring to unbaptized infants, says:

> You sinners are, and such a share
> As sinners may expect
> Such you shall have; for I do save
> None but my own elect.
> Yet to compare your sin, with them
> Who lived a longer time,
> I do confess yours so much less
> Tho' every sin's a crime.
> A crime it is, therefore in bliss
> You may not hope too well;
> But unto you, I shall allow
> The easiest room in hell. (8:126)

Cruel punishments were the rule. Whipping posts were not uncommon in the schoolroom. Boys were beaten to rid them of the Adamic nature, a suggestion made by theologians and religious leaders, such as Martin Luther, who recommended appropriate beatings as being useful restraints upon impudence and as an aid to learning. In the penal code, brandings, public whippings, the pillory, and the stocks were common penalities; even capital punishment could be inflicted for numerous crimes. (8:127) In one instance, a legislator in Maryland proposed that any child who refused to behave himself should be executed. (9:7) Some zealots believed that those who held heretical opinions should be put to death. The head of one early school was dismissed for giving students 20 to 30 lashes.

Though Harvard was a college, not a school for children, a list of its violation and corresponding fines illustrates the magnitude of the concern that behavior be guided: (4:80-81)

List of Pecuniary Mulcts (Fines) at Harvard, c. 1750

Absence from prayers,	0	0	2
Tardiness at prayers,	0	0	1
Absence from Profesor's public lecture,	0	0	4
Tardiness at do.	0	0	2
Profanation of Lord's Day, not exceeding	0	3	0
Absence from public worship,	0	0	9
Tardiness at do.	0	0	3
Ill behaviour at public worship, not exceeding	0	1	6
Going to meeting before bell-ringing,	0	0	6
Neglecting to repeat the sermon,	0	0	9
Irreverent behaviour at prayers, or public divinity letcures,	0	1	6
Absence from chambers, &c., not exceeding	0	0	6
Not declaiming, not exceeding	0	1	6
Not giving up a declamation, ngt exceeding	0	1	6
Absence from recitation, not exceeding	0	1	6
Neglecting analysing, not exceeding	0	3	0
Bachelors neglecting disputations, not exceeding	0	1	6
Respondents neglecting do. from 1s. 6d. to	0	3	0
Undergraduates out of town without leave, not exceeding	0	2	6
Undergraduates tarrying out of town without leave, not exceeding per diem,	0	1	3
Undergraduates tarrying out of town one week without leave, not exceeding	0	10	0
Undergraduates tarrying out of town one month without	2	10	0

leave, not exceeding			
Lodging stranger without leave, not exceeding	0	1	6
Entertaining persons of ill character, not exceeding	0	1	6
Going out of College without proper garb, not exceeding	0	0	6
Frequenting taverns, not exceeding	0	1	6
Profane cursing, not exceeding	0	2	6
Graduates playing cards, not exceeding	0	5	0
Undergraduates playing cards, not exceeding	0	2	6
Undergraduates playing any game for money, not exceeding	0	1	6
Selling and exchanging without leave, not exceeding	0	1	6
Lying, not exceeding	0	1	6
Opening door by pick-locks, not exceeding	0	5	0
Drunkenness, not exceeding	0	1	6
Liquors prohibited under penalty, not exceeding	0	1	6
Second offence, not exceeding	0	3	0
Keeping prohibited liquors, not exceeding	0	1	6
Sending for do.	0	0	6
Fetching do.	0	1	6
Going upon the top of the College,	0	1	6
Cutting off the lead,	0	1	6
Concealing the transgresson of the 19th Law,	0	1	6
Tumultuous noises,	0	1	6
Second offence,	0	3	0
Refusing to give evidence,	0	3	0
Rudeness at meals,	0	1	0
Butler and cook to keep utensils clean, not exceeding	0	5	0
Not lodging at their chambers, not exceeding	0	1	6
Sending freshmen in studying time,	0	0	9
Keeping guns, and going on skating	0	1	0
Firing guns or pistols in College yard,	0	2	6
Fighting or hurting any person, not exceeding	0	1	6

Puritanism forbade such activities as joyousness and whistling on the sabbath. Esthetic pleasures were considered to be reprehensible. Even singing was frowned on. Life was austere and so were the arts. (8:129)

John Knox, the Presbyterian minister who favored state support of the public schools, stated that there was a great need for discipline, because, in his view, indulgent parents pampered their children and they needed "persevering submission to be well directed discipline and progressive improvement of academical instruction." (10:40)

If education can be construed as discipline, then there was a mandate for the schoolmasters to be severe in their discipline. Whatever was deemed natural was also considered to be bad and was not to be tolerated; for instance,

play was considered to be a depravity. Allowing students to play was doing them a disservice. The teacher's responsibility was not only to teach students to read and write, but also to rid them of natural propensities and replace them with spiritual ones. (11:6)

Schools were not pleasant places: not from the standpoint of discipline; not from the standpoint of comfort; not from the standpoint of the curriculum. Therefore, students were not happy with them. Only a small percentage of the school-age population attended, anyway. If teachers felt that play was wrong and children wanted to partake, there was conflict. They were pitted against one another, and sometimes the children overcame the teachers physically. In some instances, schools were closed because of the inability of teachers to remain in charge.

Other devices used by the teacher to instill discipline--and thereby learning--were the hickory switch, the prism-shaped block on which to kneel, and the heavy book to be held at arm's length. It was only the teacher's pet, "who ain't had a lickin' yet," who was spared any stern disciplinary measures. The dunce stool and the cap were used for mental punishment. Devices employed by pupils on teachers were thrashings, which were administered by one or more boys, depending on size, and systematic embarrassments attempted by girls, shooting beans and paper wads, and other disruptive tactics. (11:8-9)

Cotton Mather, a clergyman, preached to his congregation that God was not interested in little children:

> Their bodies are too weak for labor and their minds to study are too shallow. . .even the first seven years are spent in pasttimes and God looks not much at it. (12:131)

Another clergyman stated that children were a great blessing but were dangerous. Some believed that only an infant's size and weakness protected parents from a child's rage. In fact, it was thought that children would take

the life of their parents if they had the strength to do so.

Parents practiced harsh childrearing in order to break the will of their young. One bit of advice given was, "Let every parent make it his inflexible determination that ye will be obeyed." A minister even stated that the high rate of infant mortality was the result of the immoderate love that weak parents lavished on their children. "Sinful tenderness and indulgence is the ruin of many children," he claimed. (12:131)

Even neighbors were to be chastised for not preventing any kind of rebellious behavior of children. If a family had trouble with a child, a father and a mother could depend on the help of local magistates. One colony's law allowed town officials to administer whippings to disobedient children; another prescribed the death penalty for stubborn youngsters. (12:132)

Who were the Puritans? They were Europeans who brought to the New World their social and cultural patterns, their values, educational ideas, and religion. They imposed on their culture a government that was in some ways more stern than the one they had left. They established an oligarchy, a ruling class of church members, freeman, and people with property, and bound the church and state together.

> The Puritan was a man with a sense of purpose and mission directed by God. That mission was to live in the world, engage it, destroy the antiChrist, and build a city of God in the wilderness. He was himself not so much pioneering in a new world as establishing a base of operation from which he and his fellows could lead the chosen children of God to his own migration from the Old world as only a tactical retreat from Old world forces. (13:64)

According to Hunt, the Puritan ethic was:

1. People should function as individuals; self-contained, self-supporting, self-directed, competing with one another.
2. People should be impelled by the sense of duty, particularly duty to one's calling (or chosen occupation). This idea, if pursued, required dedication to a life of hard work and a conscientiousness that will result in work well done.
3. People should aim toward "getting ahead." This requires thrift and perseverance. Material success is a sign that one has pleased God and has

been rewarded for his efforts. . . . (6:78)

The Puritans strived for material advancement, basing their beliefs on the Calvinist ethic of hard work and thrift. Their purposes for education were to ensure economic well-being and community involvement and to have a formal education that was religious. Part of the result of convincing all children of their depravity was to prepare them for an authoritarian treatment by their teachers who were supported by a theocratic state.

The Puritan child was taught to read so that he could understand the Bible in order to become a Christian and to be qualified for college. The child in the Middle colonies was sent to school not only to read and write but also to receive instruction in religion. There was heterogeneity of religious groups in this area of the New World; that is, several denominations worshipped in their own ways and established their own, or parochial, schools. In the Southern colonies, the Church of England was established by law, and orthodox Anglicanism was taught in the schools. Other religious groups provided much of the education of the poor. (14:210) Apprenticeships with master craftsmen were common means of receiving a practical education.

In the Puritan churches, the main purpose was the worship service, which was characterized by lengthy sermons that were intended to explain both evil and righteousness. Because the responsibility for salvation belonged to the individual, knowledge of the Bible and its principles was essential for salvation. Therefore, the need to read was preeminent.

The colonial teacher who was involved in the activities of the church was to instruct youth in reading, writing, and arithmetic with zeal and diligence. He was also to implant "the fundamental principles of true Christian religion and salvation by means of catechizing; he is to teach them the customary forms of prayers and also accustom them to pray; he is to. . .bring them as far as

possible to modesty and propriety." (4:16) He was also to maintain good discipline and order among his pupils. He was to teach them Christian prayers, commandments, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the questions with answers from the catechism. These would be recited in school. The end for which they were employed was the instruction of children to believe and live as Christians.

Teachers were to take care of the manners of the children both in the schools and elsewhere:

> Warning them seriously of those vices to which children are most liable; teaching them to abhor lying and falsehood, and to avoid all sorts of civil-speaking; to love Truth and Honesty; to be modest, gentle, well-behaved, just and affable, and courteous to all their Companions; respectful to their superiors; particularly towards all that minister in holy Things, and especially to the Minister of their Parish; and all this from a Sense and Fear of Almighty God; endeavoring to bring them in their tender years to that Sense of Religion, which may render it the constant Principle of their Lives and Actions. (4:26)

During most of the colonial period the curriculum was decidely religious in character and was provided at public expense only for the poor. School laws enacted in Massachusetts were expressions of the religious values of the property owners. In Pennsylvania, the first law on schooling had as its declared purpose that children learn to read the Bible. It put the burden of education on parents and recognized the importance of schools. Numbers of private schools were organized by religious groups and demonstrated the freedom they had to educate their children in their own doctrine and practices. (15:42) Teachers, sought from many sources, had to adhere to the tenets of the sponsoring religious group and propogate its beliefs through the classroom, bringing to bear the ideas about learning and student control existing at that time.

What has been the heritage from the colonial period? Certainly not its extreme disciplinary measures, but concepts about thrift, the involvement of government in public education, hard work, moralism, separation of church and

state have remained to influence contemporary society. The latter has been the means whereby American schools have been freed from their religious roots (13:66) Religious curricula and religious activities have practically been eliminated from the public schools.

Although the severe discipline of the religious moralists has been eliminated, the lack of discipline in the public schools of the United States remains a major concern, as indicated in the last few Gallup polls about the status of education in the United States. The discipline problems have shifted from an emphasis on the brutality of the teacher to today's student for involvement with alcohol and other drugs, truancy, assaults on teachers, criminal activities, juvenile delinquency, and unstable home life.

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